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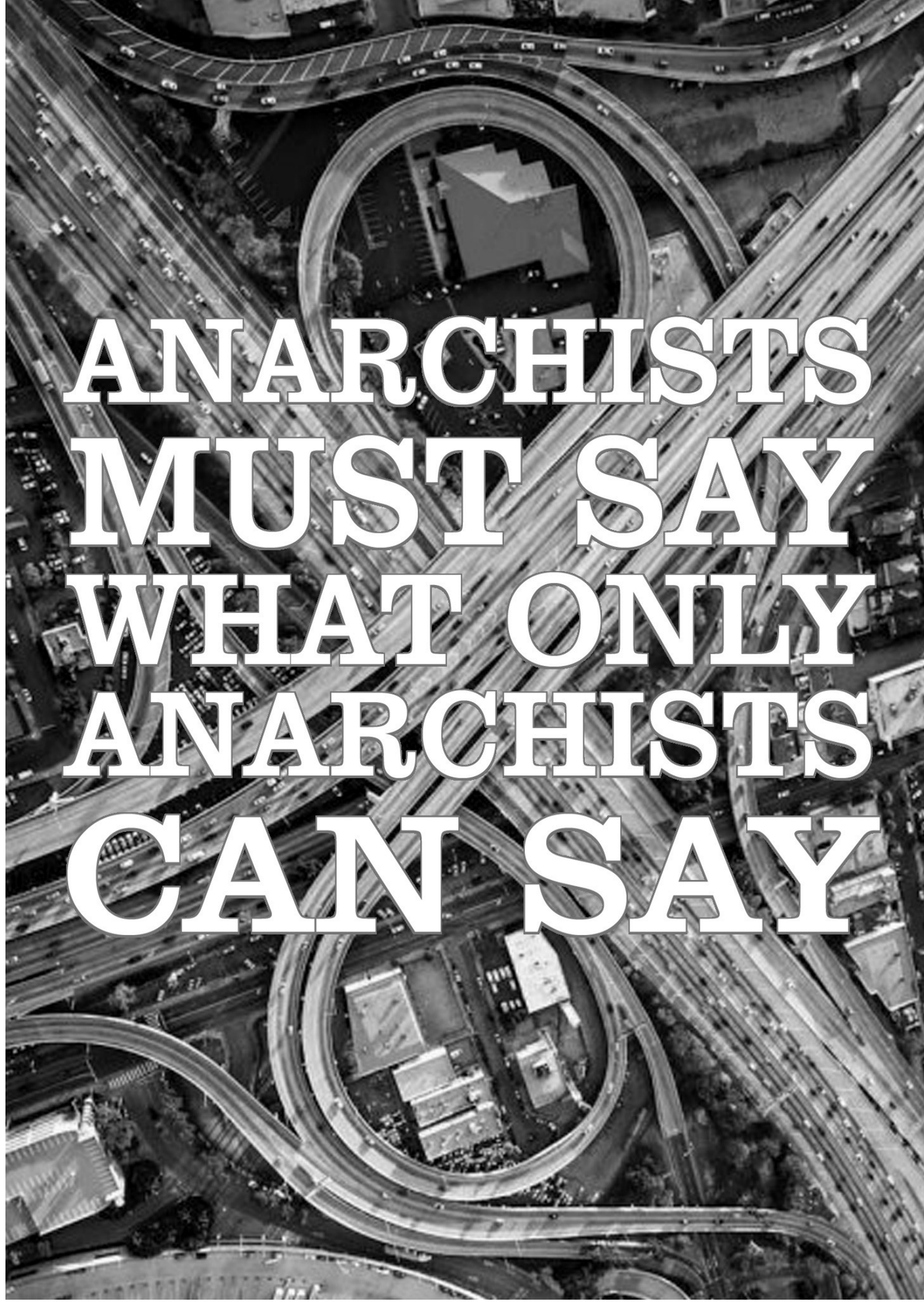

Part One

I stopped briefly on the bridge over the A14 near Milton's Tesco and watched as cars, vans and lorries appeared and vanished like shooting stars beneath my feet. For once not content with the devil getting all the best lines I made a duce-like proclamation from my impromptu balcony, 'every vehicle on this road,' I said, contains at least one for-itself individual and yet from my perspective all this is just noisy, slightly vertiginous traffic of a somewhat sinister connotation.'

I could have made a subjective case here for the apparent divergence of traffic and personhood based upon previous theoretical reflections on a theme of alienation, but it would have been made against all objective evidence. Instead I wondered at the contrary tendency, that of the steady integration of individuality and production — someone once said to me, 'I sat in my car in a London traffic jam and I looked, around me, at the other cars all stuck just like me and I thought, all of this, so much of it, how could there ever be a revolution? It is because all this modern life is so absurd that you can't get rid of it, there's no reality to appeal to.' Of course, this comment is a misunderstanding of things in the style of not being able to see the wood for the trees. In another sense it highlights the childish despair of those who seem to want to change the world by changing appearances, who give up because of the impossibility of the (absurd) task they have set themselves. They can sense it but cannot grasp it: there is no clear blue sea between the commodity and the human being.

There is no wild essence, like the red squirrel under threat but still holding on, which we could use to repopulate the wilderness. There is nothing real to go back to, and nothing at all of what existed before the motorway now survives.

Cycling away from the fact of the motorway my mind recoiled and sought some ideational solace from the perpetual launchpad of all those banal journeys. I thought on as I freewheeled down the hill, passed by white vans, park and ride buses and brewery trucks. What exactly, I asked myself, is the relation between the road (its complex of habits, purposes, rules, laws, vehicles, surface, destinations etc) and the individual beings that hurtle along it?

Is there not, I thought, an illustrative correlation here concerning human existence lived within the frame of capitalism's soft totalitarianism?

The motorway's example and metaphor of the maximised commodification of individuality and the secondary integration of its figure within a stabilising albumen of social admin.

> First the law, then the policing of the law.
> First the policing of the law, then the law.

end as some kind of golden handshake, all such solutions smack of religious falsity. To say 'we want a better world free of this or that' plays into their hands, it's so easy for politicians to say, 'we agree, we're all working together' when really there is no commonality of interest, the class system from its very origins robs some to pay others. To say 'we are against capitalism in all its forms' is enough. The specifics of what comes next is not ours to propose.

The anarchist role is negative, their aim is the destruction of all exploitative and repressive false hopes. The history of popular fronts from the 30's to the Anti-Nazi-League, to Globalise Resistance shows the 'we all march together' strategy to be a neutralising force which dissipates resistance to capital and plays down class struggle in favour of a reformist political agenda (eg anti-fascism now, revolution later). The exposure by critique of all ideologies is important because in any revolutionary situation it will be the Trots and the religious nutters who will be trying to take over and it simply makes no sense to be 'uniting' in the present with those organisations that under different circumstances will be out to eliminate you — in organisation terms there is no imperialist like an anti-imperialist.

The second function of the anarchists is highly speculative, and depends upon the collapse of the capitalist system; under these circumstances groups like the anarchists will have more of a say as people generally attempt to re-establish society. There will come a moment during this period of reorganisation when things will either return to the capitalist mode or will go somewhere else entirely (the end of the motorway), it is at this moment that saying and doing the right thing will have profound effect.

My thoughts had taken me a long way from the motorway bridge at Milton so I was pleased to get back home with the last of winter's light still lingering in the sky. After locking my bike away in the shed I paused before opening the backdoor and listened to the domestic sounds of my family inside, warm, happy and safe. Once more the image of the motorway returned to my mind, I thought of its strange black dominance of the ground beneath our feet and I muttered to myself, 'there is no hope, is that why I'm so optimistic?' I felt strangely exhilarated like a saint-knight of the errant fraternity, I may never succeed but at least I have remained true. I opened the door, 'get the kettle on love, I've been philosophising fierce.'

January 2003

Monsieur Dupont

The recent tolerance of the ugly for political purposes, this 'we mustn't rock the new left boat' implication means the anarchists have already been sidelined by their leftwing adversaries. If in doubt critique is always more appropriate than affirmation, nothing good has ever been harmed by intelligent doubt whilst current anarchist affirmations of political struggles has severely impeded their own cause. For example, that the message 'war is always a struggle between competing capitalist elites — all organisations on both sides are pro-capitalist' has not been hammered home as it was not hammered home during the Vietnam War and is/was stifled beneath the absurd sub-nationalist/anti-imperialist propaganda of the left means anarchists end up chanting for 'victory to the Viet Cong' or 'victory to the Palestinians', that is, against their own principles. One thing is more stupid than patriotism for your country and that's patriotism for someone else's country.

There is no earthly reason for parroting 'down with the USA and Israel' or 'They say cutback we say fightback' when you have already developed a position that is against all states and all governments, and when your theory has established that all national phenomena are organised by the movement of capital. Not only is it dishonest to repeat such trivialities it is bad faith not to properly engage and dispute the propagation of it by others. Anarchists should have no time to tolerate other ideologies on protest marches. If it is not (as it cannot be) their role to overthrow capital then it is certainly up to them to dispel the myths of their fellow protesters. The hundreds of thousands of sheep-like followers not really sure why they are there all yearn to be free of their ridiculous beliefs, let them at least be relieved of their leaders.

If as an anarchist you have said you are against capital then it means you are already against war, it is the 'against capital' bit that is important, not your feelings for this arbitrary incident of the moment. During every public manifestation you must show the determination of war by capital and not, as the popular front leadership would hope, 'bury our differences' for short term political expediency in the name of unity. Anarchists must say what only anarchists can say, it is important to remain true to theoretical positions and not get caught up in apparent resurgences of popular dissent. Even if there were only ten anarchists left uncompromised so long as they kept to their principles they would have a greater impact in critical moments than any phalanx of flag waving activists and their watered down 'popular' anti-capitalism.

Anarchists must undermine faith in all proposed solutions to war, repression, cheap labour etc and not promote their own. They must demonstrate how rubbish all left wing solutions really are and how there are no solutions that do not end in compromise with the generality. There is no relief, there is no peace, there is no reform; so long as the system remains there is only intensification of productivity by whatever means and that includes both war and 'people's governments'.

To be against capital in all its forms is sufficient, there is no need to tack a utopia at the

The parable is also the paradigm. Isn't driving your car on a motorway a bit like making love to a beautiful woman?

A bit like shopping, a bit like a maternity ward, a bit like filling in forms, a bit like education?

The motorway is a sophisticated conveyor belt, a factory process that produces both destination and a high velocity turnover of packaged units all done up in their cars like unique and expensive chocolates. A bit like eating, a bit like having an operation, a bit like emotions and stupid political solutions? A bit like dying, a bit like clicking on your mouse, a bit like the fall of civilisations, a bit like reading novels? Appearing here, ending there, distance and the time to cover that distance. Hold-ups, contra-flows, accident blackspots, tail-backs.

It seems you can and you cannot travel the same motorway twice.

All the movement and the events borne of movement: disease, ideas, accidents, disasters, military manoeuvres, and money (always money), getting to work, to the out of town, off on our hols, the products rolling off the line, the waste products dragged off to the dump, all that and the motorway itself untouched, ever present like a black angel's roar, like money washing over us; everything is integrated into the economy as a commodity, even our underpants. The motorway is the site of movement, just as the factory is the site of production, from a single of its products you may deduce the capitalist economy, from one car you will understand distribution.

The motorway does not move but gives form to every possible movement from the smooth flow to the grinding snarl-up.

Moving and non-movement, the motorway conditions all possible phenomena even that which reflects critically upon it (anti-globalisers hop on aeroplanes to attend far away conferences against aeroplanes, but to travel by mule would be mere conceit). Yes you may alter your car, reform it, change it for another, try alternative fuels, you can transform your driving habits, you can pledge yourself to the cause of safety; at the level of your ownership you are free to do anything, but…. nothing of what you choose has any significance to anyone but yourself, all choices are conditioned. And ethical choices, even if they are shared with a number of others remain at the level of ethics, there is no true organisation in it, it is not a politics, it can have no impact on the nature of the motorway.

The rules for the road are set by the road and not its users, there is imposition not consensus.

The conditioned response, the effect, the result cannot reach round and alter the forces determining its presence or its character. The road drives your car, it's in your unconscious, you can't turn it off, you hear it on the other side of the hill, rubber

spinning water. Nobody can stop it because nobody chose it, it is a fact, the world we live in. In the same way a television programme critical of the psycho-sociological effects of television ultimately ends by affirming the amazing versatility of the medium, it certainly cannot turn the box off and release people to do something less boring instead. Television and the motorway, unlike the Roman Emperors, tolerate, even encourage, dissent.

Outside the metaphor anarchists can refuse details and go on demonstrations, they can change their life, they can try to will the future into existence, they can go vegan, they can develop viable alternatives, can proclaim themselves against burger bars and coffee shops, they can develop green, organic, co-operative ventures. They can attempt to control every detail of their life and make it as alternative as is possible but the system itself remains out of reach, capital is untouched. When they're saving the environment by recycling their rubbish someone else is making a profit from their unpaid labour. When they're printing leaflets and shouting slogans for the holy cause someone less scrupulous and more organised is turning that to their political advantage.

Within the metaphor, anarchists can disrupt local traffic with their critical masses, they can park their cars on the hard shoulder and go and find themselves in the adjacent field of sugarbeet, nobody notices the sparks that fly off into the dark periphery. They can drive their tractors slowly, they can hold parties on the tarmac, they can dig up chunks of what they hate, they can make other drivers feel very, very annoyed by their pranks and provocations. But all of this is second level voluntarism (I am determined by the road therefore I rebel against the road), it is not deep down structural, it's at the level of 'Starbucks bad, Fairtrade good', it's secondary and not right in there, touching the heart of it. The best second level structure for political reflection on economic forces is democracy, but at all times in its history democracy has shown itself to be controlled by and not in control of, the economy. Those 'anarchists' advocating municipalism and 'real' democracy should take note of this failure.

Part Two

The system of the motorway, the social relation of the motorway is left untouched by any attack on its specifics, untouched or is it reinvigorated? Does it bloom like the desert in places where fire and rain have visited? Anarchism like that is an ethics, it doesn't hurt the motorway even though it wants to. It doesn't hurt the motorway because it is just one response to present conditions amongst many, and it takes its place alongside all other theories and actions as an ideology, that is as one strand of commodified consciousness. On the motorway, everything that can happen will happen including dissent against it, but we see how achieving the blessed condition of products for a specialised market but then they disappear or simply revert to an uncomplicated adherence to the rules of the all encompassing generality. Isn't this what happened to the communes of the Sixties and Seventies? Basic capitalist reality always reasserts itself at the level of phenomena because its rules dominate the base; rebellion and romanticism on the surface does not impact on the hidden machinery below, eventually it must give way to what pursues it. Rebellion has always been unsustainable.

There are no individual, entrepreneurial, solutions.

Part Three

The anarchists as an ethical body can continue their consumer/lifestyle protest for as long as they have the strength (I, for one, will continue my quixotic struggle to the death or some other finality) and that's fine. It is important to attempt to live the good life, to resist and say no to arbitrary authority but they will never have the necessary force to overthrow capitalism. Revolutionary agency is not the anarchists' appropriate function, this belongs to a non-political proletariat. That leaves their true political mission which comes in two parts and is dependent on the accidents of economic events. Firstly, in the present, anarchists must intervene in political debate with the intent of destroying false hopes for reform by showing how proposed solutions alter details but retain the general social relation. The role of the anarchists is that of the popper of balloons, they must be agents of anti-ideology. They must say what only they can say, they must refuse the script written for them by leftists and liberals — there is nothing to be gained by repeating easy leftwing slogans, truth and not recruitment should be the decisive factor. For example, the only reason to participate in demonstrations against the proposed Iraq war is to subvert the political manoeuvres of the 'anti-war coalition's' popular-front ideology which would use anti-government sentiment to draw power and wealth to itself. Specifically, in this case anarchists must disrupt the proposed anti-imperialism of both Islam and leftism and in the place of their national liberationism and state capitalist wealth redistribution projects they must insert an unequivocal message that rejects all states, religions and nationalisms. Despair and nihilism is a more appropriate response to the prospect of war than calling for an end to US/Israeli imperialism (what, you think they're so democratic that they're going to listen to you?)

In 1983 Kinnock, the leader of the Labour Party was robustly heckled at a CND march by anarchists as a means of demonstrating that there was no common ground between anti-capitalists and bandwaggoners, however at the recent anti-war demo in London there was no equivalent action against the pro-Palestinian statists and religious maniacs spouting their primitive accumulationist ideologies, why?

interesting they are not an end in themselves, we must remember the lessons of the self-managed counter-revolution. The workers in Argentina are only keeping the seat warm as everyone awaits the boss's return.

It is not for anarchists to celebrate when 'the people' take over, anarchists ought not to be so amazed at examples of natural ingenuity and resilience, that is after all what they base all their principles on. Unfortunately their proper political task is less appealing and more controversial, it is to poke their fingers into the wounds of revolution, to doubt and to look for ways in which the Zapatistas, FLN, ANC or any other bunch of leftwing heroes will sell out, because they always do. The questions we must ask of civil emergency and economic breakdown, which are the occasions where various social and pro-revolutionary movements appear is how exactly does capital re-establish itself again and again despite the apparent revolutionary intent of the general populace.

If the motorway is ever to fall into disuse then it will do so because of some internal dysfunction, specifically when the costs become too high to maintain it. Cars will come to a halt, the individuals inside will get out and they will walk away not looking back. They will forget instantly the purpose of this architecture which within two years of the cataclysm will fall into the field of archaeology. Anarchists have no role to play in the initial downfall of capitalism, they have no means by which they could escalate costs to the level where profits are put in danger and a crisis is brought on. It is possible that the working class, because its labour is an integral cost of production, could cause a systemic collapse by refusing to improve productivity and by fighting to increase their wages. It is possible that they could bring on a revolution even though their only aim is their own self-interest. They will never overthrow the system by choice because that is a secondary political ambition produced as a mirage by the system itself. If the working class aimed for revolution it would not achieve it since political ambition is a readymade form held within capital's array of determined responses, 'you don't like it then make it better, have a go.' The working class is purely an economic category, it cannot act politically except by accident.

It is significant, we think, that most anti-capitalists have no theory of capitalism or its overthrow other than vague aboriginalism (Palestine for the Palestinians but not Britain for the British?), productivism (small workshops, workers self-management, localism etc) or 'direct democracy' and as such, again in our opinion, the ideas they espouse are really pro-capitalist albeit for a capitalism with a human face, for a capitalism that is severely inhibited by autonomous ethical values (some hope of that). They do not see how all elements within play, including themselves, are determined and contained by capitalist reality and how they produce mere ideological reflections on the same basic productive circuit. Such initiatives whether they are called ethical capitalism or 'socialism in one country' can survive for a while by producing expensive dissent does not naturally qualify the rebel to actually change anything or even to escape the conditioning of the present. To say 'no' does not make you a time traveller to the future. I have met anarchists who live like ironside puritans and others of a deliberately decadent inclination, but whether you forbid or celebrate you do not touch capitalism itself, at every point it holds you in its palm: sometimes allowing a little more movement, sometimes gripping harder. Capitalism has encouraged democracy, fascism, state socialism, theocracy, militarism, human rights, you name it, every political vehicle is compatible with it.

Counter culture? Capital will commodify it, instigate it, reproduce it and sell it. There is no outside the loop.

The motorway cannot be undone either by ideas or practice. It cannot be undone. You think a million people like you could do the business? Well, where are they? If you haven't got them after two hundred years of agitation what makes you think they will turn up now or some time in the future? And do you really think it possible that a million people can believe the same thing at the same time? How would you check they were really thinking what you thought and not hoping to get something else out of it, a phd thesis, a promotion, a ministerial promotion, a groovy party, radical credibility, a new girlfriend? And if they did truly believe as you believe, if they downloaded your consciousness by what mechanism would that change the world? It sounds like magic: if we all think the same thing then everything will come good. Why should people believe what you say more than the promises of any other religion? The internet is full of get rich quick schemes, anarchism is just one of them.

The easy anarchist answer is that it is not thoughts that change the world but acts. So let's just pause there and consider three recent pro-action claims: on 31/10/02 activists called for the occupation of Parliament but really that was just a ruse to get lots of police out of the way whilst the activists 'acted' on other stages, fine, except of course not everyone was let in on the secret. This is not the only occasion such tricks have been used and always there is some collateral damage where those not in the know are run over like hapless hedgehogs by the exigencies of the protest elite. Why don't they ask for volunteer sacrificial pawns? Brrrm Brrrm! Our second example comes from Class War issue 84, in this it is advocated that Christians be locked inside their churches, not Muslims, Jews or Hindus, only Christians, why? Don't ask us, apparently Christians are wankers, although of course if the Christians thus imprisoned were black then such actions would come close to resembling something very unpleasant. Is revolution really to be kickstarted from cultivating prejudices against irrelevant subcultures? Whatever next, doomed publicity stunts against the monarchy? Our third example comes from the critique of recent Mayday events by various class struggle anarchists; their argument runs that dressing up in silly clothes and larking about is bourgeois (because the working class never do fancy dress) and

illustrates very well the trivialities of the middle class entrepreneurs who run the unpolitical anti-capitalist scene. Their alternative proposal is a serious return to working class actions, but there is a problem with this on two counts, the first is based in mere jealousy, there is nothing wrong with people dressed up in silly costumes running round London once a year, the problem lies in attempting to graft a pseudo-revolutionary politics onto hi-jinks of any colour; secondly, if the actions were made more militant or diffused into local working class communities (whatever they are), nobody would show up. The fundamental flaw in political action is this: the more militant (and therefore true) the action is the less people want to participate in it, the more unreal and fluffy the more inclined they will be to turn up. Anarchists, being mostly young men, still have not learnt that only young men like to fightback on the streets, everyone else will find excuses not to be there. The choice is stark, it is between numbers or ideological purity.

But even to say that rubs some up the wrong way, all discussion subverts the glory of acts. Apparently talking and thinking gets you nowhere because 'there is no point in theory without action', as if the likes of Class War or RTS have ever got anywhere. How could Monsieur Dupont demonstrate its activities on the streets? How is anarchism demonstrated on the streets? It seems after all that all deliberate interventions made by the pro-revolutionary minority are acts, what is important is whether they do what it says they will do on the tin.

We shall quickly pass over the crude philosophical underpinnings of the direct action is the only language they understand arguments because they are made tactically merely to deflect attention from the small empires of established anarchist cults dominated by backdoor authoritarians which have not increased their membership or influence despite existing for many years and, what is worse, having recruited hundreds of adherents in that time only to lose them very rapidly when it becomes clear that these so called groups and federations are really only psychological projections of one or two individuals, this not only puts people off the groups in question but paints us all as brooding loonies obsessed with our own expertise.

Pro-activist anarchists are transfixed by the tableaux of street action but they cannot be bothered to ask themselves whether what is happening is achieving anything more than the spectacle itself; what they want is the reproduction of confrontation — the recorded display of resistance becomes the end in itself, it is a fetish, it has a cyclical temporality — check out any issue of Counter Information to confirm this, it's raison d'etre lies in an assumption of the accumulationary significance of tiny uncheckable snippets of info. Have the editors of this and other similar newsheets ever considered what the shelf-life is of their information? In what way do the struggles of the past still count? Are they part of a movement to change, a brick placed on a revolutionary wall that is slowly being built across the world by those fighting their bosses, or is each act's significance merely local in both place and time? A Zapatista says, 'any struggle that wins anywhere in the world is like a breath of oxygen to us.' We do not believe him.

But that is not our point. What is important with regard to political action, and a question that should be addressed by all interested parties is the decrease in complexity of political acts as the numbers involved increase. Whilst it is easy to programme a million people into accepting football and pop music as compensations for living impoverished lives, a certain quantity of displaced violence is necessary beforehand. Programmed or imposed behaviour is easily reproducible because of the immediate alienation we are all born into. This is why there is essentially no difference in attitudes to TV or supermarkets from one end of the country to the other, because people are responding to objective reality on a secondary level, that is they act as people who do not own the context of their experiences but even so have no option but to experience life in the shadow of the volcano. In these situations their 'free' actions conform very readily to half a dozen psychological types. Things are very different though if you ask, as pro-revolutionaries do, people to take control of their lives, or at least to protest against their conditions. If coercion is used in the name of revolutionary values, as in Northern Ireland (and you have sufficient firepower), you may impose on people a will to 'act' politically which they will do in the same passive way as others visit DIY stores, it becomes their culture. But if you want to remove all leadership structures and demand that people think and act for themselves then it becomes almost impossible to motivate more than a few thousand individuals from a wide geographical area to participate, and even then the specifics of the action will be undertaken by a relatively small number of young men with the majority content with an onlooker role. As the numbers of protesters increase, as with an anti-war march for example, so the 'action' taken and the reason for the actions becomes more and more simplified. To cut a long story short, it seems to us that the less people there are participating in political actions the more the acts conform to a defined set of ideas but this is felt to be not real enough because the numbers involved are so small. Contrariwise, the more numbers there are involved the more restricted are the possible actions and less defined the ideas. With the participation of a million people acting against capital the actions open to them appear to us to be primarily negative, namely the withdrawal of labour. The only other option is that of the mass demonstration which when boiled down to its essence is a gathering together in one place of many people for a set period of time beneath a one or two word slogan. To ask anything more is unrealistic, everyone will find an excuse not to act and to limit their participation because the pressures of reality carry too great a penalty. The exception to this is when people are compelled to respond to an objective economic crisis, as in Argentina at present, in this case they have no choice but to act. Even so, whilst the demonstrations, collectivisations and occupations of this emergency communism are